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ABSTRACT

Developments in one major corporation's ongoing program to evaluate employees' English language proficiency are discussed. The testing program was developed by the multinational E. I. DuPont de Nemours corporation for use with international employees. The history and rationale for the selection of the five English tests used are outlined, the tests are described, and some sample training recommendations based on test performance are presented. The tests selected include the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), Speaking Proficiency English Assessment Kit (SPEAK), a writing sample evaluated according to guidelines for the Test of Written English (TWE), the Preliminary TOEFL, and the Comprehensive English Language Test (CELT). Recommendations for training are based on test scores and focus on improving rapid listening and reading comprehension skills, spoken comprehensibility, and writing abilities. The recommendations are implemented in ongoing training programs in the United States. A brief bibliography is included. (MSE)

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PROFICIENCY ENGLISH LANGUAGE TESTING OF INTERNATIONAL EMPLOYEES: A CASE HISTORY

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Proficiency English Language Testing
of International Business Employees

The purpose of this paper is to present some recent developments in an ongoing program to evaluate the English language proficiencies of a significant number of employees of a major U.S. Corporation, E.I. du Pont de Nemours and Company. There are essentially three parts to this paper: 1) History and Rationale for the selection of the English tests used in the program; 2) Descriptions of the English tests; 3) Sample Descriptions of training recommendations, based on the test scores. Test score profiles indicating the English language proficiency levels necessary to compete with American business counterparts will be presented later in the papers. Recommendations for training are based upon the results of the tests and focus upon improving rapid listening and reading comprehension skills, spoken comprehensibility, and writing abilities of the international business employees. Such recommendations are then implemented into the ongoing training program in Delaware and West Virginia, among other locations.

I. History and Rationale. Methods for teaching ESL have shifted in the past decade from teacher-centered to student centered approaches. In the world of ESL communication training, we are witness to methods such as the Silent Way, Counseling Learning, Total Physical Response, and Strategic Interaction, among several others. In the business ESL training world, communicative methods are presented as client-oriented or audience-sensitive methods and have as their goals sociolinguistic, strategic, and linguistic competencies. Some of these communicative approaches often focus upon fluency in English prior to accuracy, i.e., they focus upon the business person's ability to interact in the

language first and then motivate the person to refine pronunciation and grammatical inaccuracies at a later time. Experience with major corporations has indicated that such goals are sometimes counterproductive because when employees interact fluently but inaccurately in either business or scientific settings, those employees often are not advanced or continued in their current positions or assignments precisely because too many English language inaccuracies were present in their written reports or oral presentations. Such standards of performance for accuracy in communications are also applicable to native English speakers in the business and scientific world.

The above background for current ESL methods is not presented as a criticism of the area of teaching English per se. The incursion into the topics of accuracy after fluency, or vice-versa, is made only to point out that the goals of some ESL methods for college or university students may result in language performances which may not meet the stringent demands of the business and scientific communities for accurate communication at all times. Further, and with respect to the topic of this paper, most ESL instruments in use for business persons today are accuracy based and not very valid instruments for evaluating ESL students who have been taught by fluency - first methods. While significant strides have been taken to design ESL tests which measure communicative competencies, i.e., interactive and fluency skills, the business world still insists on accuracy first in communication and, as such, still relies on accuracy based, discrete-point, analytic ESL tests. However, this author actively encourages the business community to look into current developments in testing ESL as reported by

Carroll (1973), Oller (1979), Briere (1979), Canale and Swain (1981), Angelis (1982 and 1982b), Meloni, Sparhawk, and Weaver (1983), Farhady (1983), Duran, et al (1985) and Manning (1987).

The rationale for selecting the particular tests for use with some Du Pont employees is based on the types of tests and the accessibility and purpose of the tests. With respect to the types of tests used in the program, all of those selected are proficiency tests, i.e., tests which measure the test taker's overall ability in English on a broad scale. With respect to accessibility, the Du Pont Company requires ESL tests which are easily obtained and scored by their Employee Relations Department personnel in more then 60 countries. The tests used in the current program are:

- The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), (1964-89)
- The Preliminary Test of English as a Foreign Language (Pre-TOEFL), (1984-89)
- Speaking Proficiency English Assessment Kit (SPEAK), (1982-89)
- Test of Written English (TWE), (1986-89)
- The Comprehensive English Language Test (CELT), (1986-89)

The singular purpose of these selected tests is essentially to help determine whether or not the employee is ready for a position or assignment requiring English language skills in listening, speaking, reading, or writing.

The above tests were selected not only because they are accessible to all Du Pont sites but also because of a need to centralize, in Wilmington, Delaware, the testing process for uniformity in score

interpretations. Further, the above tests can be administered internally through either the TOEFL Institutional Program or by buying the tests outright and keeping them on site within Du Pont Employee Relation Department offices. Thus, Du Pont personnel can both control the testing process by setting up their own internal calendar testing dates as well as score the tests and distribute results to Wilmington Headquarters for interpretation and recommendations based on the test results. For example, some employees may be recommended to take more English instruction before assignment to the parent company in a U.S. location. Other employees may be invited directly to the U.S. because their English test scores indicate that they can already contribute to training programs conducted in English.

II. Descriptions of the English Tests.

1. Test of English as a Foreign Language. (1964-1989).

The TOEFL is one of the tests of the TOEFL Program, which includes the Test of Spoken English (TSE), the SPEAK test, which is a shelf-version of the TSE, the Pre-TOEFL Test, the Test of Written English (TWE), and the Secondary Level English Proficiency Test (SLEP). For business purposes, the Institutional TOEFL is administered in-house to employees as test security is not an issue when testing Du Pont employees. The Institutional TOEFL is one hour forty five minutes long and can be administered by either a Company employee or by an outside consultant to the Company. The TOEFL consists of three sections: 1) Listening Comprehension, which measures the employee's ability to understand English as spoken in the United States;

2) Structure and Written Expression, which measures the employee's

control of significant structural and grammatical items in written English; and 3) Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary, which tests the employee's ability to understand, infer, abstract, and scan for facts from a variety of written materials, as well as to understand the meanings of words in written English. The TOEFL is used for employees who have either demonstrated their English abilities or who have scored highly (480 +) on the Pre-TOEFL. The Institutional TOEFL discriminates very well only at the higher levels of proficiency, i.e., 480-600 +. Because it does not discriminate well at the lower scales, i.e., 227-470, the TOEFL is not used when assessing new hirees overseas; instead, the Pre-TOEFL test is used for new employees. The total TOEFL scaled section scores range from 220-670, while the total TOEFL test score ranges from 227-677.

The preferred score range for Du Pont employees on the Institutional TOEFL is 500-510. Such a total score, together with the preferred score ranges for the SPEAK and Writing Tests, significantly assists in the decision to bring an employee directly to Wilmington for training or extended assignments.

2. Speaking Proficiency English Ability Kit (SPEAK).

The SPEAK test is a retired form of the International Test of Spoken English (TSE). There are currently two additional forms, SPEAK 2 and SPEAK 3. The SPEAK test assesses an employee's comprehensibility in spoken English. Currently, there are four components of spoken English which are evaluated: 1) overall comprehensibility, reported on a 0 to 300 scale; 2) fluency; 3) pronunciation; and 4) spoken grammar. The latter three components are scored on a scale

of 0.0 to 3.0. The SPEAK is a semi-direct test of spoken English because it involves tape-recorded speaking tasks rather than face to face conversation and interaction. What is unique is that the SPEAK does not measure only pronunciation. It also measures the employee's control of spoken grammar as well as the employee's spoken fluency, i.e., pauses or long periods of silence, rephrasings which detract from the employee's clear, spoken expression of a message, and/or long and frequent oral fillers (ummm, uh, mmmm's) which also distract from the spoken message. Thus, while a candidate may have excellent pronunciation in English, the candidate's overall score may reflect poor spoken grammer and/or disfluency of the sort which interferes with the intelligibility of the spoken English.

An overall comprehensibility score of 220 is currently the minimum score for international Du Pont employees for direct assignment to a U.S. facility. This score is one of a three part score profile used in the current program. The other two scores are the TOEFL score and the score from the direct test of writing abilities.

The SPEAK takes approximately 20 minutes to complete and may be administered on a one to one basis or in groups. If administered in groups, certain typical earphones and individuals microphones are needed for each employee taking the test.

All tapes are rated twice by trained raters. The raters are typically native speakers who work for the Company or consultants who have been trained to rate the tapes. Rater training is possible through Educational Testing Services at Princeton, N.J. or by means of the SPEAK test. The SPEAK contains a set of rater training materials,

i.e., eight rater training tapes and six rater testing tapes, by which native American Employee Relation Department personnel can learn how to rate the Spoken English of their international counterparts.

3. Test of Writing English.

While the Du Pont international employees do not take the official test-center Test of Written English (TWE), an in-house writing prompt is used and all employees' writing samples are scored using guidelines similar to those for the TOEFL-TWE. The written test is designed to provide a direct measure of an international employee's writing ability. The writing sample is scored holistically rather than by discrete points, and uses a criterion-referenced scale from 1 to 6. A score of 6 is the highest possible and indicates that the employee's competence in writing is at a near-native level.

The writing test requires all employees to write upon one topic. The employees are informed that they will have 30 minutes to plan, write, and edit their essay. They are also advised that overall quality of writing is important, moreso than quantity; they are encouraged to address the topic directly, to give details to support their individual position, and to organize their writing as coherently as possible.

The test of writing ability complements the TOEFL (or Pre-TOEFL) and the SPEAK test as neither is a direct test of writing abilities. The importance of the writing test is that in many cases it demonstrates an area of real strength in the English language skills of international employees. This is especially true of employees from Japan, i.e., international employees from Japan often show strength in

their writing abilities in comparison to their listening comprehension or spoken comprehensibility skills.

A testing program which tests separately the skills of listening comprehension, spoken comprehensibility, reading comprehension, and direct writing skills best equips Employee Relations Department personnel to design or to find instructional programs which address the individual skill gap(s) of their international employees.

4. The Pre-TOEFL.

The Preliminary Test of English as a Foreign Language complements the TOEFL in the following ways. While the TOEFL discriminates very well at the high levels of English proficiency, e.g., 480-670, the Pre-TOEFL discriminates more accurately at the beginning and intermediate levels of English proficiency, e.g., 200-500. The Pre-TOEFL measures the same components of English proficiency as the TOEFL, but it is both easier and shorter. The total testing time is 70 minutes.

The Pre-TOEFL can be ordered by the Company and be administered by Employee Relation Department personnel, in-house, on Du Pont sites. This test is given to new hirees or to employees whose English proficiency skills have not been evaluated by any standardized ESL tests. The Pre-TOEFL is a more efficient means than the regular TOEFL of assessing employees who are frustrated by items that are too difficult. If an employee scores 480 + or 500 on the Pre-TOEFL, that employee may be soundly and sensitively encouraged to take the regular TOEFL at a near-future date. By administering the Pre-TOEFL first, much loss of face and frustration, caused by failure to achieve well on the TOEFL (or other such high-powered tests), is obviated. The

employee is happier with his testing experience, and, more importantly, the results more accurately reflect the employees English proficiency levels.

5. The Comprehensive English Language Test (CELT).

The CELT is a commercial, standardized test which measures an employee's listening comprehension, English structure, and vocabulary skills. The CELT is readily available from McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, and takes approximately 2 1/4 hours to administer. CELT has a fairly high reliability co-efficient, ranging from .82 to .94 on the Listening Section, .88 to .96 on the Structure Section, and .88 to .97 on the Vocabulary Section. This test, like the other standardized multiple-choice proficiency tests, does not measure spoken or written Engish. The CELT does have a purported .82 correlation with the TOEFL and may be scaled to a TOEFL score when the TOEFL is not available; for example, a CELT overall score of 80 is said to be approximately equivalent to a score of 500 on the TOEFL. The CELT is a reliable, valid, and useful instrument for measuring the listening comprehension, structure, and vocabulary skills, on-site, of employees who need to be tested immediately.

III. Sample Descriptions of Training Recommendations based on Test Scores.

This section of the paper contains sample proficiency recommendations for English language training. These recommendations are based upon the results of the tests but it is most important that the recommendations be viewed with a realistic tentativeness for the following reasons. First, the recommendations are specifically designed

for a particular Company whose corporate-cultural profile is not easily replicated by other companies. Secondly, the population of international employees who are currently participating in the program are persons with outstanding potential and who are being trained for major management positions within the Company. While many of the participants have advanced degrees, including Doctorates, all have at least a four year degree from accredited colleges or universities in their own countries. The problem of the tentativeness of the following recommendations is further underscored by the problem of trying to serve different users; in other words, what works well for international Du Pont employees may not work for employees of other corporations and businesses.

With the above caveats stated, the following recommendations, based upon the results of the Pre-TOEFL, SPEAK Test, and in-house writing tests scored by the guidelines for the Test of Written English, are presented as professional information and as topics for further study.

Proficiency/Training Recommendations

SPEAK (Test of Spoken English) (0-300)

250-300 Completely comprehensible in typical speech, with only occasional grammatical or pronunciation errors; spoken English, in general, is smooth and effortless. Recommendation: a credit-course in Oral Presentations/Communication at an International University Campus, in classes with native-English speakers.

200-240 Generally comprehensible in spoken English with some errors in pronunciation, grammar, word choice; occasional pauses and rephrasing which do not interfere with intelligibility of speech. Recommendation: advanced pronunciation/listening class, semi-intensive; 4-6 hours per week, 10 weeks, at a well recommended English Language Institute (E.L.I.).

150-190 Generally comprehensible, but with frequent errors in pronunciation, grammar, word choice; some pauses and rephrasing which detract from the person's clear expression of a message. Recommendation: 6-8 hours per week, 10 weeks, in a high intermediate-level listening/speaking class at a well recommended E.L.I.

100-140 Spoken English is not comprehensible due to very frequent pronunciation errors, long and frequent pauses or rephrasing, very limited vocabulary, and little control of spoken grammar. Recommendation: 8-12 hours per week, 12 weeks, in a low-intermediate level listening/speaking class at a highly recommended E.L.I.

0- 90 Spoken comprehensibility is too low to assess, even in the most basic, functional English. Recommendation: employee should be enrolled in a beginning-level listening/speaking class of a recommended E.L.I. The class should meet 8-12 hours per week for at least 6 months.

Pre-TOEFL Test (200-500)

475-500 Employee may take one regular, 3 hour per week course, in his or her Department's area of responsibility, e.g., marketing, public affairs, business communication, or chemistry/electronics. This course should be taken with native-English speakers. In lieu of this course, a 6 hour per week course, for 15 weeks, in the advanced level of an E.L.I. may be taken. Such a course would include oral presentation pertinent to the employee's profession as well as high-level reading and writing assignments about topics related to the employee' short term goals within the Company. Employees in this range should be encouraged to take an Institutional TOEFL after completion of their programs.

340-474 Intermediate Level. Employees should enroll in a recommended E.L.I. for an intensive English program, i.e., a minimum of 10 hours per week for a minimum of 6 months (240 hours). The program must include the components of listening, comprehension, spoken comprehensibility, reading comprehension, writing and grammar instruction, and vocabulary expansion.

200-339 Beginning Level. Employees should enroll in a recommended E.L.I. for an intensive/extensive English program, i.e., a minimum of 10 hours per week for 12 months. The program must include the same components as the Intermediate Level proficiency employees except that much more emphasis should be placed on listening and speaking skills for the first 6 months.

Test of Writing Ability (In-House Topics) (1-6)

While international employees do not take the official TOEFL Test-Center TWE, their writing samples are scored along the same guidelines as the TWE.

5.5 - 6.0 Employee clearly demonstrates competence in writing. While occasional errors occur, they are very few. The employee can organize and develop his/her writing, effectively keeps to the topic, uses sufficient details, and demonstrates consistency and facility in the written use of English. Such employees should enroll in a 3 hours per week business communications course. The course should be taken with native-English speakers. Depending on the goals of the employee, the course can be either oriented for managers, e.g., written communication for businessmen, or scientifically oriented, e.g., a technical writing course for researchers and scientists.

4.5 - 5.5 Employees in this range demonstrate competence in writing although occasional errors appear, only some of which obscure meaning. A writer in this category is generally well organized but with less details than a 5.5 - 6 writer. The writer may also demonstrate some inconsistencies with grammar and usage. Recommendations for thes category of writer include an advanced level writing course for 4-6 hours per week for 15 weeks. Such a course would be designed for the employee's particular profession, i.e., business or technical.

3 - 4.5 Employes whose writing falls in this category demonstrate either developing or minimal competence in writing abilities. Such writing contains one or more of the following weaknesses: inadequate organization or development, failure to use enough details to support the topic, some serious errors in sentence structure or word choice which may obscure meaning, and inconsistent control of English spelling and punctuation. Recommendations for this category of writer include an intensive writing class at the intermediate level of a recommended E.L.I. The class should be a minimum of 6 hours per week for six months.

2 - 3 Employees whose writing falls into this category demonstrates less than minimal competence in writing abilities. Such employees should be enrolled in a beginning-level writing class for approximately 6-8 hours per week for at least 6 months, possibly 12 with re-evaluation after each 6 month period of instruction.

1 - 2 Employees whose writing falls into this category demonstrate incompetence in writing. A writing sample in this category will contain serious writing errors, may be illogical or in-

coherent, and will be severely underdeveloped. Employees in this category should be enrolled in a beginning-level writing class for approximately 8-10 hours per week for at least 6 months, and, probably, 12 months. Re-evaluation should be made after each 6 month period for further recommendations.

These instructional recommendations are based upon the SPEAK, (TSE), the Pre-TOEFL, and an in-house test of writing abilities (which uses the scoring guidelines of the TWE). If pressed for a felicity or 'happiness' profile of an employee's English language abilities, using these three testing instruments, the following profile is recommended for Du Pont international employees.

SPEAK	220 +
Pre-TOEFL	480 +
Writing Ability	4.5 +

(Substitutions for Pre-TOEFL: TOEFL 500 or CELT 80%)

The above profile is considered essential when the international employee is expected to do the following:

- contribute to Du Pont training programs in the U.S.A.
- communicate effectively with their American counterparts in Du Pont, either by telephone, memo or E-mail.
- communicate more effectively in oral presentations, e.g., business proposals, technical reviews, group meetings, conferences.
- after returning to their home countries, to become bridges between subsidiary companies and the U.S.A. parent company in fields such as research, manufacturing, marketing, management, occupational safety, external affairs, and law.

Finally, the above recommendations are intended to be implemented in the employee's home country. Such a testing program reflects the long-range training policy that this particular Corporation has adopted for the benefit of its international employees. Some Du Pont employees, for example, will be tested very early in their careers and

may spend from one to three years in English training programs in their home countries even before they come to the U.S. for assignments or training.

Conclusion.

The purpose of this paper was to present some recent developments in assessing the English language proficiency of international employees of a major U.S. multinational corporation. The rationale for selecting the particular tests used in the current ongoing program with Du Pont international employees lies in the accessability of the tests as well as the ease by which both the tests can be scored and recommendations can be made based on the test scores. The descriptions of the SPEAK Test, the Pre-TOEFL and TOEFL tests, and the Test of Written English contained in this paper do not address perhaps the best reasons why they are excellent choices for use in the business and scientific world, i.e., they are by far the most researched of all foreign language tests and the most widely used tests throughout the world. Finally, the training recommendations based on the tests described in this paper are in no wise intended to be generalized, in any measure, to the numerous and varied business and scientific corporations at large. What these recommendations set forth are bases for future time-analysis studies to investigate not only the validity but also the reliability of the recommendations for future training programs of one particular Corporation.

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'Felicity Profile'

SPEAK (TSE)	220 +	(0 - 300)
Pre-TOEFL	480 +	(200 - 500)
Writing Ability	4.5 +	(1 - 6)

Substitutions for above Pre-TOEFL score:

CELT	80%	(0 - 100%)
TOEFL	500%	(200 - 670)

END

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